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Japan Seminar Project

26 June 2007

Brushstrokes of Kanji in Present Day Japan and the United States

The cultural differences among the children in Japan and the United States will be shown through writing styles. The style of writing in each country is a cultural difference that is still in existence today. Young students need to realize that all cultures should be accepted regardless of their writing styles, customs, and differences.

The Wikipedia encyclopedia describes kanji as Chinese characters used in modern Japanese writing to mean "help" or "information."¹ The Chinese characters that make up kanji are still used in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. The pronunciation of the characters varies throughout different regions. Readers can read kanji and know what the characters mean whether or not they pronounce them the same as the writer or other readers.

Teaching kanji with calligraphy strokes to the American students will allow students to grasp part of a day in the life of a Japanese student. From modern calligraphy strokes to the present day electronic age, a computer is able to write in English, Arabic numbers, or in kanji. In the future, inconsistencies of the cultures will be minimized, while facilitating communication and finding similar cultural values.

The American students will learn to write limited kanji in class by watching brush strokes being made by the teacher and on the computer. The students will then make their own calligraphy strokes with paint and brush. A hands-on project like this gives

the student something to remember while tying the lesson in with future studies of Japan.

In today's world, a Japanese child must learn about 2,000 to 2,500 characters by the time they finish high school.² In Japan, kanji writing is done with a bamboo animal hair brush. The project will use school paintbrushes, black tempera paint, and large construction paper or cardboard (see Fig. 1). Eighteen of the easier kanji symbols will be taught to seven and eight-year-olds (see Fig. 2).³ The students will initially be taught calligraphy strokes using the word "tree" in kanji. The order in which the strokes are made is important. Horizontal strokes will usually be done before vertical strokes. In 2003, the first graders of Japan were to learn approximately 80 kanji characters.⁴ That surpasses the 26 alphabet characters in America. Depending on the age of the student and the time allowed, the numbers from one to ten will be taught.

Contacting a city or prefecture in Japan in order to correspond with elementary pen pals will offer the comparison of students learning from each other through drawings, symbols, or words in their own language (see Fig. 3). Close contact between American and Japanese instructors via the Internet guides what has been learned about each other's culture. Questions could be asked from one group of students to another. Class sizes in Japan are larger in number of students. Two American elementary classes might be needed to write one Japanese elementary class. These letters or picture postcards could be exchanged via the Postal Service at a time frame determined by the instructors. Successes will depend on the amount of enthusiasm and instruction that is used with this hands-on cultural exchange. Planning to use Japanese-American

contacts will help to garner concluding results along with profound elements of surprises for the students and instructors at each end of the world.

Fig. 1

Lesson #1 Kanji Calligraphy Writing/ Any Elementary grade

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The instructor shows and explains what the student is to do with one kanji symbol (tree) while the student listens and observes.

A computer may be used to display the steps for a kanji symbol. For ideas, see the address and website below.

2007 Yookoso!
P.O. Box 49875
Austin, TX 78765
<http://www.yookoso.com/pages/kanji.php?file=display&grade=4&date=1>

The student then traces on the desk, table, or in the air for use of concrete or kinesthetic awareness.

Using the paper, black tempera paint, and brushes the student should emulate what the instructor/assistant has put on the board or easel.

Goals or Objectives (more may be added by each teacher)

The students' best work should be displayed in the hall, cafeteria, or classroom. Discussion about the symbols will transmit information of the unit to other classes within the elementary school. (The kanji symbols may even be displayed in other locations of your town.)

The instructor or students may teach the other elementary classes some of the kanji symbols, and also an awareness of Japanese culture.

Cultural differences and similarities will be explored.

Students will listen for themes and create summaries of this unit.

They will share and discuss with the team in the classroom and with other elementary students.

The symbols may be used in some haiku and poetry writing or illustrated in story writings.

Geography skills will be identified along with community characteristics.

Fig. 2

Kanji Handout for Seven and Eight Year-Olds

Name _____

木

tree



trace calligraphy steps

一

one

二

two

三

three

四

four

五

five

六

six

七

seven

八

eight

九

nine

十

ten

白

white

青

blue

本

book

机

desk

木

tree

牛

cow

犬

dog

兔

rabbit

Fig. 3

Lesson #2 Pen Pal Exchange/ Any Elementary Grade

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Using contacts from local Global Alliance (Sister Cities), Universities, Regional U.S. Embassies, or Japanese-American citizens and Japanese-American clubs, a class may be acquired in the elementary school within a city or prefecture of Japan.

Arrange by e-mail what is to be the end goal or outcome.

Enthusiastically expect your students to participate and do their best in the project.

Mail by the United States Postal Service to the pen pals.

Goals or Objectives (more may be added by each teacher)

Critical thinking will enable the student to listen, observe, and ask well thought out questions concerning the Japanese correspondence project.

Collaboration with classmates and use of the media center will provide teambuilding and a venue for more ideas.

Social Studies concepts of individual and community needs and wants will be explored.

Geography and map reading skills will be enhanced.

Present and past factors will be investigated.

Cultural awareness similarities and differences will be examined and studied.

Literature and story telling will be constructed with beginning, middle and end capabilities using pen pal experiences as a springboard.

Math data of Japanese school statistics will be charted or graphed.



Endnote

- ¹ "Wikipedia," 22 June 2007 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanji>.
- ² Jeffrey Levick, "Welcome!," *Faces*, Jan. 2006, 14.
- ³ Courtesy of Mariko Takahashi, Tulsa Community College Global Education.
- ⁴ Florence Sakade, *A Guide to Reading & Writing Japanese*, 3rd ed. (Vermont: Tuttle 2003) x.

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